

## Willapa Watershed, WRIA 24

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Willapa Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

The Willapa Watershed, located on Washington's south coast, includes the Johns, Elk, North, Nemah, Naselle, and Bear River drainages.

Annual precipitation in the Willapa Watershed ranges from 60 inches per year along the coastal lowlands to 140 inches per year in the Willapa Hills. Most precipitation arrives during the winter months when overall water demands are the lowest. During the summer, snow pack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

### Factors affecting water availability

Seawater intrusion is a real concern on the Long Beach Peninsula and other areas located near the Pacific Ocean. The peninsula is essentially a sand bar, and the water table is relatively shallow, not much above sea level. Use of jetted wells (drilling with high-pressure water) is common and it is difficult to properly install a surface seal on such wells. Susceptibility to contamination from septic discharges is also a real concern in this area.

There is also an adjudicated area (Black Lake & Tarlatt Slough), just north of Ilwaco.

Increased demands from population growth, low summer and early fall streamflow levels, and impacts from climate change add to the challenge of finding new water supplies in WRIA 24, especially during the summer months.

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife has recommended that Ecology not issue water rights in a large portion of this WRIA, in order to protect fish populations. See [RCW 77.57.020](#) for more information.

### MORE INFORMATION



### Definitions

**Adjudication:** A legal process conducted through a superior court to determine the extent and validity of existing water rights within a basin or basins.

**Aquifer:** An underground layer of sand and gravel that acts as a reservoir for groundwater.

**Mitigation plan:** A scientifically-sound plan to offset the impacts of a proposed water use.

**Seawater intrusion:** The movement of salt water into freshwater aquifers.

**WRIA:** Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental administration and planning purposes, Washington is divided up into 62 major watersheds, or WRIsAs.

## **Water supply available for new uses**

Applicants seeking new water appropriations will likely need to mitigate the impacts their water use will have on surface water bodies.

Connecting to an established water supplier is generally the fastest and simplest option for obtaining new supplies of water.

This watershed has many small farms and permit-exempt domestic well uses. The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of ground water (most commonly, single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf).

Additional options for finding a water supply include processing a water right application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf). The applicant may need to develop mitigation to offset the impacts of their water use to surface water.

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” [www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf).

## **Pending water right applications in this watershed**

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received.

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change\\_transfer\\_use.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html)

The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer) <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County  
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>

- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA  
[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr\\_app\\_rss.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html)
- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools  
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLSWebMap/default.aspx>

**For more information**

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360-407-6300

*If you need this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872.  
Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341*



